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ABSTRACT

The conference paper considers the sexual rights and needs of handicapped students and the teacher's role in developing appropriate learning experiences. (CL)

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SEX EDUCATION FOR THE EXCEPTIONAL: MORE THAN A RIGHT -- A NEED

Rights have been expressed by a variety of persons, organizations, cultures, religions, and institutions in the name of God, the State, membership in a group, or by the fact of being a human being. These rights have been thought of in terms of those conditions or behaviors which should not be interferred with by their very existence or in their practice. However, some rights which are seen as essential for the expression of minimal worthwhile life have not been extended to all members of many groups - certainly women have been denied certain rights even though they might be identified as members of a specific group, and exceptional populations have been excluded as participants in the exercise of basic rights of group membership (Johnson, 1978).

The case for sexuality rights recognition and expression by exceptional populations can be demonstrated by the statements of rights which have been brought forward by various groups and professionals.

> The Right to Love. No citizen, agency, or any legislative, executive, or judicial branch of government shall deny to handicapped persons the relationships of friendship, love, and marriage through any means not applicable to all other persons.
>
> (A Bicentennial Declaration of Human Rights for Handicapped Persons. Central Michigan University, Office of Career Development for Handicapped Persons)

Additionally, Sol Gordon has provided a statement of rights for sexuality which includes the right for free access to information on sexuality and

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birth control, the provision of privacy for the expression of sexual behavior and the recognition that "In the final analysis, sexual behavior between consenting adults(regardless of mental age) and whether it is homo or hetero, should be no one else's business - providing there is little risk of bringing an unwanted child into this world" (Gordon, 1974, p. 8).

As professionals and others committed to the welfare, care-giving, and education of those with exceptionalities we need to respond to these right statements in at least three levels:

1. The recognition that these are indeed rights of all individuals, including those with exceptionalities.
2. These are rights which ought not to be interferred with unless that interferrence is applicable to all citizens.
3. The issue of non-interferrence must be expanded to include the need to assist in the acquisition of knowledge regarding sexuality and sex functioning, and the need to assist in the provision of opportunity for sexual behavior expression consistant with that behavioral expression granted all other citizens.

In order for persons with exceptionalities to assume as complete a life as is possible there should be opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge requisite for such participation. If computational and reading skills are seen as important educational goals then there needs to be an equal priority given over to the knowledge gained from sex education.

The need then, is more inclusive than the need for sexual knowledge and expression of sexual behavior by those with exceptionalities. The need extends to teachers and families so that as the child grows and develops the concepts of sexuality, sexual functioning, and family life education

as curricular areas can be confronted, planned for and taught.

Teachers and tohers of us who participate in teaching situations must first be able to acknowledge our own sexuality, and second be able to enhance the social awareness of exceptional and non-exceptional individuals toward the sexual rights and needs of all persons. However, a recognized awareness is not enough. We must actively pursue a course of education and training which will allow for the expression of sexuality by anyone who finds the opportunity to appropriately engage in both the right and need, and the pleasure and responsibility of sexuality.

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